

House Rejects Measures To Require Term Limits

Less Stringent Constitutional Amendment Proposals Await

By Kenneth J. Cooper
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The House yesterday took its first votes ever to limit congressional terms and rejected proposals for limits of six or 12 years, the first two of four proposed constitutional amendments to be considered under the Republicans' "Contract With America."

Simply holding the term-limit votes met the narrow promise of the GOP contract, but the anticipated defeat of every version would also mark the House's first outright rejection of one of the contract's 10 provisions, and one of its most popular with the public. Eight others have been passed and sent to the Senate.

Noting the widespread public support for term limits, House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) sought to blame Democrats even before the final votes. "Give us 60 more Re-

publicans next year, and we'll pass term limits," he said.

Whatever the final outcome last night in the House, Senate Majority Leader Robert J. Dole (R-Kan.) vowed he would bring term limits to a Senate vote anyway, probably in June. The Senate Judiciary Committee has endorsed a lifetime limit of 12 years for the House and 12 for the Senate.

In its vote on the first of the four term limit proposals last night, the House defeated, 297 to 135, a Democratic proposal for a retroactive limit of 12 years that would make senior lawmakers leave after three-fourths of states ratified the amendment.

Rep. John D. Dingell (D-Mich.), a term limits opponent first elected in 1954, dubbed the Democratic version "the real thing" because it would affect sitting lawmakers sooner. Critics

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denounced it as "a poison pill" designed to kill the term limits movement.

A lifetime limit of six years that would not count prior service, sponsored by two-term Rep. Bob Inglis (R-S.C.), was next defeated by a larger margin, 316 to 114. Term limits activists have favored a six-year limit, but veteran lawmakers said that would not allow enough time for members to master the workings of government.

Two other Republican versions would set a limit of 12 years, with states having the option of imposing shorter limits under a compromise proposal by freshman Rep. Van Hilleary (R-Tenn.). The 12-year limit would be uniform under the proposal of eight-term Rep. Bill McCollum (R-Fla.).

Vote counts showed Republicans suffering defections among their senior committee chairmen and failing to attract enough Democrats to come near the two-thirds majority needed approve either Hilleary's or McCollum's. The Inglis version was backed by 96 Republicans and 18 Democrats and opposed by 182 Democrats, 133 Republicans and one independent.

Republicans argued they deserved political credit just for bringing the issue to the floor. Rep. Charles T. Canady (R-Fla.), a two-term law-

maker serving as chairman of the House Judiciary subcommittee on the Constitution, said that before yesterday none of the 180 proposals for congressional term limits introduced since Congress first met in 1789 had seen floor action.

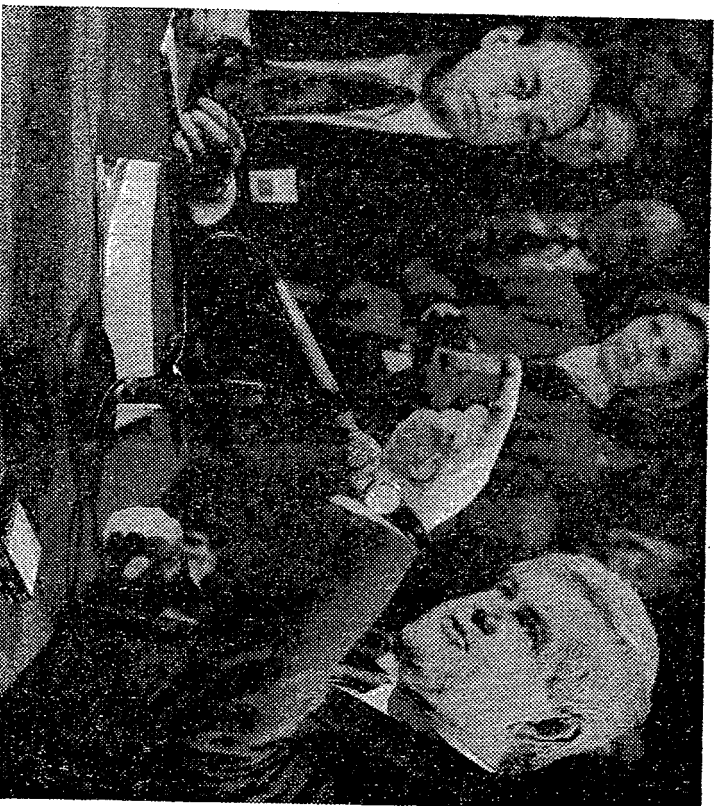
The term limits debate, which despite its historic nature lacked drama or much doubt about the outcome, roughly divided the House along party and generational lines. Supporters were primarily Republicans and newcomers, while Democrats and senior lawmakers largely made up the opposition.

Term limit supporters said they had public opinion on their side, citing polls that have consistently shown almost four out of five voters support mandatory limits on service in Congress. Popular support, McCollum said, "may be reason enough to enact them."

Nine-term Rep. Pat Williams (D-Mont.) disagreed, saying, "Sometimes the American people are simply wrong."

Since 1990, 22 states have adopted term limits for their congressional delegations—by ballot initiative in 21 of them. The Supreme Court could decide in a pending Arkansas case whether states have authority under the Constitution to set what critics consider another qualification for serving in Congress.

"It is clear that voters want more than the party in power to change,"



"Give us 60 more Republicans next year," House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) said at a news conference, "and we'll pass term limits."

BY RAY LUSTIG—THE WASHINGTON POST

Canady said. "The people want the power structure in Washington to change. . . . Will we or will we not listen to the American people?"

Slightly more than half of the House's 435 members have been elected since 1990 and almost a third of the 100-member Senate in that period. Last November, Republicans

captured control of both bodies for the first time in 40 years. The term limits issue figured in the first defeat since 1862 of a House speaker: Thomas S. Foley (D-Wash.), a 30-year lawmaker who opposed term limits and blocked a House vote.

"American voters . . . already have the power to impose term lim-

its," said Rep. John Conyers Jr. (D-Mich.), who arrived with Foley in 1965. "I do not think it is a good idea to deny these voters the right to elect the person they think best represents their interests."

Dingell, whose 40 years in the House make him its longest continuously serving member, said that current House members have served an average of 7.5 years and senators an average of 10 years, according to the Congressional Research Service.

Judiciary Chairman Henry J. Hyde (R-Ill.), first elected in 1974, cited the value of congressional experience that long-serving senators from both parties had brought to past national crises. He mentioned Sens. Everett Dirksen (R-Ill.), Henry M. "Scoop" Jackson (D-Wash.), Hubert H. Humphrey (D-Minn.), Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.), Arthur Vandenberg (R-Mich.) and Sam Ervin Jr. (D-N.C.). "You don't find them in a phone book," Hyde said.

Inglis, who has promised to serve only six years, responded to Hyde's speech with sharp criticisms of how Congress has performed on major issues in recent years. "Experience at what? Balancing the budget?" Inglis asked. "The arrogance of this place is showing. . . . We want you to get rid of you—that is what they are telling you with term limits."

Rep. Tillie Fowler (R-Fla.), in her second term, said that term limits would make Congress "closer to the

people" and "reduce the power of staff, since the most powerful staffers are always those who work for the most senior members."

She also suggested that automatic turnover of Congress would further the recent trend toward a more demographically diverse membership because 72 percent of female and 81 percent of minority lawmakers were elected to open seats.

McCollum said term limits would end a careerism that has squeezed out "citizen legislators." The ban on lawmakers' earning outside income, intended as an ethics reform, instead has made them cling to public office and "please every interest group" to get reelected, he said.

Some term limit advocates have urged Congress to vote on a statute to authorize the states to restrict the tenure of their own representatives. Such a law would be of questionable constitutionality but would need only a simple majority vote.

Gingrich, a supporter of 12-year limits first elected in 1978, said that House GOP leaders would "have a meeting and reassess" once the Supreme Court rules on state-imposed limits. In the Senate, first-term Sen. Hank Brown (R-Colo.) said he hoped Dole would schedule votes on both a constitutional amendment and a term limits statute.

Staff writer Helen Dewar contributed to this report.